

Sandy Pew
5 Jan 07

388 2450

GREAT FALLS TRIBUNE 2/5/2007

GREAT FALLS Tribune 2/5/2007

Bush wants to boost parks funding

USA Today

WASHINGTON — National parks would be a big winner under President Bush's 2008 budget, and a plan to match up to \$100 million annually in private donations could guarantee increases for a decade.

Bush's budget, being unveiled today, would give the National Park Service \$2.4 billion next year, administration officials told USA Today. That includes a \$258 million increase for daily operations, up 14.5 percent. Since 2002, those funds have risen 1.5 percent above inflation.

The president proposes adding at least \$100 million a year for the next 10 years. The funds would be used to hire 3,000 seasonal park rangers, guides and maintenance workers each summer, an increase of more than 50 percent. In addition, more than 1 million children could be enrolled in youth programs.

On top of that, Bush wants

Congress to guarantee that the federal government would match philanthropic donations each year, up to another \$100 million. Currently, about \$20 million is contributed each year by supporters of national parks, such as family foundations.

Taken together, the proposals could provide \$3 billion in new parks funding over the coming decade. In 2016, the parks will celebrate their 100th anniversary, and Bush wants them to be in better shape than they are today.

"I think it can be a source of healing for Americans," Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne said. "This one is not partisan. This one is American."

The proposal is being welcomed by groups that advocate on behalf of the nearly 400 sites managed by the National Park Service and have been a thorn in the Bush administration's side during lean years. The National Parks Conservation Association was seeking an increase

of \$250 million in operating funds for the parks.

"This is a renewed commitment that national parks should be a national priority," said Tom Kiernan, the group's president. "It's a catalyzing initiative at a wonderful time for the national parks."

The proposals would have to be approved separately by Congress. The \$2.4 billion parks budget, with its record increase in operating funds, would become final if Congress allocates the funding. The matching-funds proposal would have to be approved by committees with jurisdiction over the Interior Department.

Taken together, they would add thousands of new park workers to guide visitors with programs such as interpretive walks and campfire talks. Volunteer coordinators would be added in 44 sites.

Seasonal workers have been cut during lean budget years, resulting in a 10-year decline.

Gateways to Yellowstone

Protecting the Wild Heart of Our Region's Thriving Economy



National Parks Conservation Association®
Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations®

May 2006

About This Report

Gateways to Yellowstone synthesizes four studies on the economy of Yellowstone National Park's gateway region. These six counties in Wyoming and Montana share a close relationship with the park and the complex of wildlands at the core of the Greater Yellowstone region.

Most of the data and other information supporting this document's findings come from these four foundational studies. The reports that detail these studies are available on the Internet at www.npca.org/northernrockies/gateway. Or you may order copies from the Northern Rockies office of NPCA, P.O. Box 824, Helena, Montana 59624. Telephone: (406) 495-1560. E-mail: northernrockies@npca.org.

The four studies are:

■ ***The Economy of the Greater Yellowstone Region: Long-Term Trends and Comparisons to Other Regions of the West***

RAY RASKER, Senior Economist, Sonoran Institute, Bozeman, Montana (2006)

Rasker analyzed economic data to examine economic success in the Yellowstone region and compare economic performance with other regions and similar national park gateway and non-gateway counties throughout the West.

■ ***Yellowstone Wildlife and the Regional Economy: Review of Economic Study Results and Analysis***

CHRIS NEHER, Senior Economist, Bioeconomics, Missoula, Montana
JOHN DUFFIELD, Ph.D., Adjunct Research Professor, Department of Mathematical Sciences, The University of Montana, Missoula (2005)

Neher and Duffield reviewed recent studies regarding visitor and resident attitudes, opinions, and behavior related to wildlife and wildlife-related issues in the Yellowstone National Park area. (Used with the gracious permission of the Yellowstone Park Foundation.)

■ ***Wildlife's Contribution to the Greater Yellowstone Regional Economy***

SUZANNE MILLER, Biometrician, Dunrovin Research, Lolo, Montana (2006)

Miller analyzed the economic contributions of big game hunters and wildlife watchers in the Yellowstone region. She also devised and conducted an original Internet study examining the business use of wildlife-related terms for marketing and branding.

■ ***Economic Development in Environmental Economies of the Northern Greater Yellowstone Region.***

JEFF GRAFF, MPA, Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana (2006)

Graff interviewed 95 business owners and managers exploring their perspectives on doing business in the Yellowstone region, the region's future, and important factors in their decisions to move to, or establish businesses in, the area.